

A Platonic Theology

Excerpts from Pseudo(?)–Apuleius’ Summary of Plato’s Dialogues

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When the Platonic view of the gods is discussed nowadays, the focus is often very fixedly on the demiurge and on daemons, with the gods in the ordinary sense dropping almost out of view. This is in part due to the interests of the so-called Middle Platonists, or perhaps rather to their pedagogical needs: knowledge of the gods, after all, could be presumed for their audiences, but students required extensive explications of these more esoteric figures.

A 2nd-century CE Latin text – only rediscovered in the last century by R. Klibansky and recently published by J.A. Stover¹ – which has been (perhaps wrongly) attributed to Apuleius, the North African Platonic philosopher and novelist, offers something of a corrective. Transmitted without a title and indeed with a large gap at the beginning, it contains summaries of Plato’s oeuvre, boiling each dialogue down to a series of doctrinal statements. It thus gives us a holistic view of how Plato was understood by one bilingual follower.

In its current form, the text covers *Republic* 3–10, *Euthyphro*, *Menexenus*, the *Apology*, *Crito*, *On the Soul* (=Phaedo), *Laws* (incl. *Epinomis*), *Letters* (treated as one work), *Parmenides*, *Sophist*, *Statesman* (*Politikos/Civilis*), *Timaeus*, *Atlantici* (=Critias). Out of this material, I here give my translation of (most of) the passages touching on gods and daemons as well as some related topics.

Due to the COVID-19-related closures, I am not in a position to make use of Stover’s critical edition or commentary, but must rely on what appears to be a preliminary version of Stover’s text (sans punctuation and Greek words) used for a paper co-written with M. Kestemont,² the digitized manuscript,³ and a paper by G. Hays offering some notes on Stover’s edition.⁴ Once (*diis volentibus*) I have access to the edition again, I may create my own (non-critical) Latin text and complete translation and make it available online, since it is quite unfortunate for such an important text to be so thoroughly inaccessible.

In the translation, “he” always refers to Plato, not (primarily) the characters in the given dialogue.

In the footnotes, I call the author the “epitomator”, i.e. summarizer (of Plato’s works).

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¹ *A New Work by Apuleius. The Lost Third Book of the De Platone* (Oxford, 2016).

² <https://github.com/mikekestemont/Apuleius> (text uploaded by M. Kestemont). The paper is J. Stover & M. Kestemont, “Reassessing the Apuleian Corpus: A Computational Approach to Authenticity”, in: *The Classical Quarterly* 66.2 (2016), pp. 645–672.

³ https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Reg.lat.1572.

⁴ G. Hays, “Notes on the ‘New Apuleius’”, in: *The Classical Quarterly* 68.1 (2018). There is another excellent note on the text, although irrelevant here, by Mikhail Shumilin in CQ 69.1.

From the summary of the *Republic* (lat. *Res publica*)

Republic 4

[...] As for the temples (*templis et aedibus*) of the gods and their statues and rituals (*sacris*), ceremonies, festivals (*feriis*), and as for the Manes, he is of the opinion that their proper order should not be instituted until the manner (*religio*) is pronounced by a response of an oracle. [...]

Republic 5

[...] He also says that *daimones* (gr. ΔΑΙΜΟΝΑC), whom we call Genii or Manes,⁵ exist ('have substance').

[...] He says that those who decorate the temples (*aedibus*) of the gods with spoils of war are wicked.

[...] He is of the opinion that the true good (*bonum legitimum*) has an incorporeal existence ('substance') and that only what is noble (*honestum*) is good.

Republic 6

[...] The forms are incorporeal and have the same substance as The God and that principal nature of the good,⁶ but the Sun is also a god.⁷ [...]

Republic 7

[...] The God is incorporeal and is the same as the nature of the good.

(or: The incorporeal god is also the same as the nature of the good.) [...]

Republic 9

[...] He is of the opinion that the good state is an image of the celestial order (*caelestis status*).

Republic 10

[...] There are incorporeal forms of all things, and they (=the forms) are arranged (*constitutatas*) by the providence of The God.

[...] He believes that there are two inclinations in the soul, of which one is good, the other evil, so that they cannot coexist at the same time; and things are such that the purpose (*finis*) of life is to live in accordance with virtue. After these things, he discusses the immortality of the soul. Then he shows how the one who has justice is dear to the gods because they have made themselves similar to them. But one who is unjust, seeing that they are opposed to their (=the gods') virtues, also stands in opposition to them. [...]

⁵ These are two very different equivocations – the Manes and Genii are only very rarely said to be the same in Latin works. Presumably the epitomator is casting a wide net because of the manifold meanings of the word *daimon*, including "personal fortune/fate" (~Genius) and "ghosts of the dead" (~Manes). Compare the excerpt from *Laws* 4.

⁶ This is an "and" of identity. The incorporeal god (the demiurge) and the Form of the Good are the same, according to the epitomator.

⁷ This may not be the exact sense of this last phrase (*sed et solem deum esse*).

And he teaches that there is an underworld⁸ (*inferis*) and that it really exists ('has substance'), and that the souls of the evil are punished, but those of the good are honored.

Then he concedes that some things take place by fate or necessity, (but) that on the other hand there is something up to us ('in us') which is brought about by a good or evil manner of living. [...]

The souls of the deceased sometimes pass over (*transire*) into the bodies of different animals, and in their turn, those are transfigured into (the bodies) of humans, but such that, when they have passed over, they do not remember the previous life; and that each person has their own *daimon* (gr. ΔΑΙΜΟΝΑ), which we call a Genius.

The summary of the *Euthyphro* (lat. *Euthyph<h>ro*)

In the *Euthyphro* he shows through argumentation how the immortal gods preside over good things, but never introduce causes of evils.

From the summary of the *Apology* (lat. *Socratis defensio*, gr. ΑΠΟΛΟΓΙΑ)

[...] The Sun and Moon and the other Stars are gods, and also certain souls of themselves⁹ (*per se*), which he calls *daimones* (gr. ΔΑΙΜΟΝΕΣ). [...]

[...] He also thoroughly demonstrates that the soul is immortal and that the underworld (*inferos*) exists ('has substance').

(Or: that those in the underworld=the dead exist.)

From the summary of the *Crito* (lat. *Crito*)

[...] Also the souls of the deceased (*defunctorum*) live in the underworld (*apud inferos*) under the rule of gods and laws.

From the summary of the *Phaedo* (lat. *De anima*, gr. ΠΕΡΙ ΨΥΧΗΣ = 'On the Soul')

[...] He talks about the providence of the gods, which forbids leaving this life before the appointed day, and disapproves of undergoing a voluntary death without any kind of command (*nulla ratione dictante*).

He believes that the gods have an especial (providential) consideration for human affairs.

He believes that the soul is immortal and incorporeal, and that it passes over into other bodies when it has gone out of the previous ones.

⁸ Literally "that there are those of the underworld", but probably metonymically (=underworld), but we could capture both possible senses by saying "that there is an afterlife".

⁹ I.e. souls without bodies – see on *Laws* 10.

There are gods in the underworld, too.

Besides, there is something just, good and noble by nature, and this has an incorporeal substance. And the virtues have (or: are attained in?) a certain relation/order/succession (*consequentia*) between themselves.

He believes that the origins and ends ('deaths') of things come about out of opposites, and that, when life disappears, death follows; and reversely, life arises out of death.

Learning (*doctrina*) is nothing other than recollection (*re-memorationem*).

After this, he mentions the substance of all things (*substantiae universorum*), which he believes to be eternal and immutable and perceptible only to reason. Further, that (the substance) of the things which arise is sensible and mortal. [...]

He again discusses the inclination of the soul here, and says that it receives no more than two, to virtue or to wickedness.

Further, he is of the opinion that the earth has a round shape and is located in the center of the world, surrounded by heaven. And humans live in many different low regions.¹⁰

Not all things are brought about by fate, but there is something up to us ('in us').

He also believes that sacrifices for the immortals gods ...¹¹

And burial is indifferent.

At the end of the book, he praises Socrates as the most exalted of men.

From the commentary on the *Laws* (lat. *Leges*)

Laws 4

[...] The God is the ruler of the world (*mundi rectorem*), present in every part of it,¹² and governing it according to the law of nature and to justice: punishing the evil and honoring the good, who are even fortunate/blessed (*beati*).

Further, he says that there is no friendship among the foolish but only among the wise, who are also the friends of the gods; all evil persons are wicked, and therefore should be prohibited from making offerings (*vota facere*) and sacrifices (*inmolare*) to the gods.

He arranged the order of devotional practices (*religionis*) such that we should first honor the celestial gods; then those below (*infernos*); after these, the ethereal Manes.¹³

¹⁰ I.e. in so many large holes.

¹¹ Hardly that they are indifferent, so there is a gap here. This must have something to do with the sacrifice to Asclepius Socrates asks to be made for him just before he dies.

¹² The World Soul. Not distinguished from the demiurge and Form of the Good?

¹³ The epitomator creates a threefold division out of a fivefold one, since Plato has (1) Olympian gods and those who keep the city = collapsed into "celestial gods"; (2) the chthonic gods = "those below"; (3) *daimones* = omitted or conflated with 2 or 4 [cf. the excerpt on *Republic* 5]; (4) heroes = "ethereal Manes"; (5) ancestral gods [not deified ancestors!] = omitted. The almost oxymoronic "ethereal Manes" well captures the peculiarly Greek category of the heroes as elevated dead.

Nemesis, that is, the avenging goddess¹⁴ (*ultricem deam*), exists (*esse*). [...]

Laws 5

[...] There are also gods in the underworld (*apud inferos*).

[...] The soul is immortal.

[...] He is of the opinion that the gods punish those who have harmed anyone. [...]

Laws 6

[...] He is of the opinion that only the wise person is calm (*mansuetus*) and like the gods¹⁵ (*similem dei*). [...]

Laws 8

[...] He thinks that every day there should be a public sacrifice (*publice aliquid immolari*) to some one of the gods. [...]

Laws 9

[...] He believes that the gods exist ('have substance').

[...] He assigns the authority to punish the souls in the underworld to the providence of the gods.

Laws 10

[...] Sun and Moon and the other Stars and the Earth are visible gods, and the soul is older than all bodies. And of those (things) which exist ('which are and have substance'), some are at rest, others in motion; but soul both moves itself and is the cause of motion for others, and thus the world is governed, and humanity is provided for (*curam agi*); for it is a goddess¹⁶ and has all virtues/powers, and so it watches over human affairs because they are by nature related (*cognata*) to it.

[...] Our plans/intentions (*consilia*) are in our power but the outcomes of our plans are effected by fate.

[...] Souls are immortal, and in the underworld (*apud inferos*), the souls of evil humans are punished by gods who are neither corrupted by gifts¹⁷ nor ignorant of any evils.

Daemons (lat. *daemonas*) are rational souls, by themselves (*per se*), without a body.¹⁸

Laws 12

[...] Souls are immortal, and in the underworld (*apud inferos*) they have gods for rulers, who pronounce judgement about the life they have led previously; and fate is distinguished from

¹⁴ Nemesis was strangely both adopted early in Rome and mentioned fairly often in literature yet remained continually perceived as a "foreign" name requiring explanation (with *ultrix* or '(female) avenger' being the canonical translation).

¹⁵ Literally 'like the/a god', but this is a generic singular.

¹⁶ Feminine because soul is feminine in Greek and Latin. I do not think we have cause to think that the god, gendered masculine, who is "ruler of the world" and "present in every part of it" (*Laws* 4) is distinct from the World Soul; but here, in *Laws* 10, the soul is spoken of generically – including, but not only, the World Soul.

¹⁷ I.e. sacrifices cannot free an evildoer from just punishment in the afterlife.

¹⁸ Most pagan philosophers assumed that daemons were also embodied, albeit in subtle, usually invisible bodies.

that which is up to us ('in us'); and he is of the opinion that there are two inclinations of the soul, either toward virtue or toward wickedness.

And he thinks that the principal mind of The God¹⁹ is ...²⁰ of the world and rules everything.

He does not doubt that all Stars are living beings, both rational and divine.

Epinomis ("the thirteenth [book] of the Laws which is also entitled EPIINOMIC")

[...] Innate qualities are not sufficient for virtue without learning and the will of the gods.

After this, he discusses the world, about The God/the gods (*deo*), and what the cause of all good things for humankind is: for the gods govern the world by their providence, with an equal view also to human affairs. [...]

The soul is incorporeal and older than all things; the cause of action belongs to it.

In this book, he adds a fifth body (=element), which he calls ether, so that the first bodies will be fire, air, water, and earth. And living beings live in all of these; the immortal ones among these are those which are in heaven. These are therefore moved in their order,²¹ and forever in the same manner. And furthermore, there is providence. And the Sun is greater than the Earth, and they are living beings.

Then he says that the two principles (*initia*) of things are soul and body; and the soul has the power (*potestatem*) of action and generating, but the body is of a condition to be generated and to be acted upon.

He believes that ether and air and water are located between fire and earth;²² and is also of the opinion that there are invisible gods; and he also says that daemons (lat. *daemonas*) are living beings which inhabit the air,²³ and that they are the interpreters and messengers of our actions, whereas the immortal gods are placed beyond all passibility (*affectionem*), and neither succumb to any desire nor undergo any suffering.

He turns the discussion away from these to talk about nature, which he believes to have eight powers (*potentias*), by which the world is governed through reason and order. The first is the power of the Sun, the second of the Moon, the third of those Stars which are not called planets²⁴ (*erratica*); the (other) five are those who contrarily are called planets. [...]

From the summary of the *Letters* (lat. *Epistularum liber*)

[...] The souls of the deceased are in the underworld. [...]

And he speaks about the principal nature, which he believes is the cause of all things, both good and evil; and he is of the opinion that the second gods are the visible ones, the Sun and Moon

¹⁹ "The mind of the principal/first god" would make better sense. In light of other passages, I think the epitomator's point is that the World Soul is or has a mind/intellect or *noûs*.

²⁰ There seems to be one word missing – something to the effect of 'governor'.

²¹ Referring to the planetary spheres?

²² So, from the outermost/highest to the innermost/lowest: fire, ether, air, water, earth.

²³ It is important to note that the epitomator does not explicitly conflate the invisible gods and the daemons.

²⁴ The fixed stars.

and the other Stars; in the third place, the daemons²⁵ (lat. *daemonas*); but he believes that the souls of humans too are marked (as counting?) among the celestial souls (*hominum animas placet illi signatas esse caelestium animarum*).

He believes that gods are not touched by passions (*affectionibus*), either of desire or of grief, [...]

[Only the wise person lives a happy life?] because only the wise person is a citizen (*civilis*) and a friend and has knowledge of the gods.²⁶ Therefore there cannot be an end to human evils until they have become philosophers (*philosophati fuerint*). Further, no evil can happen to the wise person.

The soul is immortal and those of evil persons are punished in the underworld. [...]

The summary of the *Parmenides*²⁷ (lat. *Parmenides*)

In the *Parmenides*, he teaches how all problems (*quaestiones*) must be discussed from either side (*ex utraque parte*), because this is the most apposite method for the investigation of the truth. He also says something about the forms, which he calls ideas (gr. {E}ΙΔΕΑC), viz. incorporeal substances which are like a kind of exemplars for all bodies ... can only be surmised.²⁸ For he says in this book how everything is both one and many and how <all things> are constituted of opposites.

From the summary of the *Sophist* (gr. ΣΟΦΙΣΤΗΣ)²⁹

[...] He thinks that an incorporeal thing (*incorpoream rem*) is the first substance of (all) things, and became the origin for incorporeal things; and he defines what a mortal animal is, and says that it is an ensouled (*animatum*) body; but he denies that virtue and evil-doing are corporeal things; the things perceived by the senses are by nature in flux and changeable; but the very substance of things which is ever the same (*semper eodem modo se habeat*) and unchangeable is understood (*intelligi*) by the mind and reason. [...]

And he speaks about the providence of The God, by whose art and plan (*ratione*), he thinks, the world is governed. [...]

From the summary of the *Statesman* (lat. *Civilis*, gr. ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΟΣ)

²⁵ This would make all invisible gods daemons; but compare on *Epinomis*.

²⁶ A generic singular (*dei*).

²⁷ I include this not because it tells us anything about the gods but because it is noteworthy, compared to later Platonic philosophy, that the epitomator does not take it to have reference to the gods. Indeed, he seems to take it as a sort of methodological rather than a dogmatic text.

²⁸ I.e. not certainly known. This may or may not be in reference to the forms.

²⁹ The word (but not the title) is translated as lat. *professor*.

[...] For a set span of periods (*saeculis*), the world is now ruled by The God himself;³⁰ at other times, it will revert to a contrary state, because it is a rational animal and because it is corporeal. This reversal is like a sort of suffering, since all bodies have a mortal nature; for The God is not the cause of this reversal, since he is always like himself. And (Plato) thinks that all terrestrial animals are repeatedly changed and take on different forms again and again, because their soul, once the previous (bodies) are exhausted, always passes over into new ones, and is reborn anew from the dead. [...]

The summary of the *Timaeus* (lat. *Timaeus*)

In the *Timaeus*, he says that there is a substance that is incorporeal and eternal and that is always the same (*semper eodem modo se habere*), and which can only be perceived by reason.

Further, bodies exist ('have substance') and arise ('are born') and change and pass away ('die'), and are perceived by(?) opinion through the senses;

and beautiful are those things which are hidden(?) among(?) (*tecta ad*) the form of incorporeals, as it were the best exemplar; of an uglier material/matter (*materiae*) are those things which are reduced to the imitation of bodies.

It also seems to him that the order of the world has its origin from, and is governed by, a god (or: The God). It is difficult to give an account of this god (or: The God himself); therefore the origin of the world must be related by the conjectural evidence of arguments and not by evident (*perceptibili*) reasoning.

Further, the gods are the origin of all good things, and of nothing evil.

And the world is define as a unique/unitary/single (*unum*) rational, wise living being, with a shape similar to a ball, consisting of four bodies – fire, air, earth, water. When any parts of these evaporate within the world, they are not outside of it, because it is united (to itself) and so is self-sufficient (*sibi ipse sufficiens*). And it is in circular motion,³¹ but (only?) because The God did not want it to die, but wanted the Sun and Moon and the other Stars to be gods.

Then he says that the World Soul (*mundi animam*) consists³² of an incorporeal substance which is indivisible (*inpartibilis*) and unitary (*individua*).

... and from their mixture ...³³

After these, he says that lust, fear and wrath and similar passions exist(?) by nature.³⁴

He then judges that the souls of evil persons (*hominum*) do not remain unpunished after death but pass over into the bodies of women (*mulierum*) or into those of animals if(?) they have not

³⁰ The sense that 'The God' (*deus* = gr. *ho theós*) is a specific, definite entity (=the demiurge and likely also the World Soul) should not be projected onto Plato, but must be accepted for the epitomator.

³¹ I.e. rotates around its center.

³² The word *concretus* suggests growth rather than creation – so it seems that the epitomator is deliberately glossing over the distinction between demiurge and World Soul in the *Timaeus*.

³³ I cannot see how this is to be connected with the previous or subsequent tenets.

³⁴ There seems to be something missing, or I have not hit the meaning.

renounced such transgressions. But the souls of those which have lived rightly and honestly live in the underworld in a state of bliss (*beato statu*).

Further, that virtue and evildoing are in our own power, but their outcomes arise from fate.

Then, that living beings not only ...³⁵ on earth ... also moon.

And all living beings move through six motions: up, down, right, left, forwards, backwards.

Then he shows how the sense organs belong to the soul (or: what the sense organs of the soul are like).

He is of the opinion that there is a principal mind (*rationem*) of the world, and that the necessity³⁶ of (all) things is in its power, since matter (*materia*) is without quality or shape but receives the forms only through the management of the maker (*faciente*), and so qualities come into it.

Besides, there are fire, air, water and earth but no emptiness in the world and nothing outside it.

The rational part of the soul is located in the head, whereas spiritedness (*animositatem*) is in the heart, and desires in the liver; and these (latter) two are mortal.

Nobody purposely does evil;

Insanity has corporeal causes;

Only the noble (*honestum*) is good.

The power (*potentiam*) of the soul is the Genius of each person, and the good have a good Genius, the evil an evil one.

Conclusions

Although the epitomator seems to have been partly motivated to harmonize the dialogues, there are certainly some discrepancies which could have easily been smoothed over.³⁷ In particular, there does not appear to be a consistent view of what *daimones* are; rather the author describes or translates them in divergent terms – though one striking tenet is that they are described as unembodied souls.

On the other hand, the Form of the Good, the demiurge ('The God') and the World Soul seem to blend together into one entity, a marked difference from Apuleius,³⁸ who says that the Celestial Soul (which is nothing else than the World Soul) is subservient to the "fabricator god", the demiurge (*De Platone* 1.9).

The visible gods (Sun, Moon, Stars, Earth) are clearly important to the epitomator, as are the gods ruling over the souls in the underworld, and the providence of the gods in general (whereas fate is not elevated to particular proximity to the gods). But the invisible gods remain shadowy at least in the extant portion of the text, Nemesis being the only invisible goddess we hear of by name (though of course others may

³⁵ The meaning of the words that are lost is obviously something like "not only live on earth but also on the moon".

³⁶ I.e. the fate or course of all things; all things are in its power..

³⁷ One is even pointed out explicitly by the epitomator: the four elements in the *Timaeus* and the five in the *Epinomis*.

³⁸ If Apuleius really is the author of *De Platone*, which I find myself equally persuaded to accept and to deny.

have been named in the summaries, e.g., of the *Philebus*, *Phaedrus*, or *Symposium*). This is again in contrast to Apuleius, who situates gods like Minerva and Neptune in the highest spheres of the world (*De deo Socratis* 2), quite unlike the “intermediate powers”, the daemons (ibid. 6).³⁹

The anonymous epitomator, in sum, confirms some of our expectations but subverts others: ‘The God’ is central but is primarily the World Soul, with the role of demiurge clearly secondary;⁴⁰ daemons are present but cause considerable confusion, rather than testifying to a unitary Platonist conception; references to “the gods” as a group, or to their providence, show continuity with broader polytheism; and, perhaps most strikingly, the gods of the underworld have an absolutely central role, even if their nature and place in the divine hierarchy (so to speak) are quite unclear.

³⁹ Again, things might look differently if the epitomator’s summary of the *Phaedrus* were extant.

⁴⁰ One might (and perhaps ought) to read the *Timaeus* summary as making a distinction between The God (=the demiurge) and the World Soul, but this is certainly not what the epitomator finds in/reads into the other texts.